

Skills education way to go

By Geoffrey Mutegaki and Conan Businge

Determined to improve an education system beset by challenges, the newly appointed education ministry permanent secretary, Alex Kakooza, says there is need to refocus the country's education to produce all-round students.

Poverty, hunger, disease, and strife all impact access to education in Uganda. Kakooza says it will require everyone's participation in transforming the country's education system.

Kakooza, who made his remarks late last year during the commissioning of St Andrew Kagwa High School-Gombe, Kawaala in Wakiso District, said all schools need to refocus their teaching. This was the first function he officially presided over as the new permanent secretary of the education ministry.

"It will not just be about classwork. We need students who are all-round and can stand on their own after graduation or at any other level of education," he asserts.

He says the Government is refocusing its attention to skills development, with emphasis on vocational education.

Nearly 50% of the population earns less than \$1.25 (about sh3,600) per day, according to UNICEF. One-third of children below the age of five suffer chronic malnourishment. The low remuneration of teachers and the poor quality of teaching and learning; are always constant reminders of some of the challenges in the education sector.

"We need to embrace an all-round education model, which has to involve business, ICT, handicrafts and other skills that our children can use to become job creators," Kakooza says.

He adds that so many children are talented, but such skills are not harnessed by many schools; since they are not considered important.

With the new lower secondary (O'level) curriculum back to the drawing board,



Kyewalabye (left), Kakooza and Mulindwa during the commissioning of the school last year. Photos by Abou Kisige

Kakooza says the revamp will partly focus on developing skills in students.

"Science and technology is a big aspect of development in the country. That is why as a country, we are emphasising that students embrace sciences," Kakooza said.

The Rev. Fr. John Baptist Ssebayinga, who led mass during the commissioning of the school, also emphasised the need to develop children's talents.

"Education is important, but we also need to help children realise their dreams through the talents they have. Schools and the Government should provide these facilities where children develop their talents," Fr. Ssebayinga noted.

Mulindwa Mukasa, the principal, also noted that St. Andrew Kagwa High School



Students entertaining guests during the commissioning of the school

embraces skills development through handwork and entrepreneurship projects. He welcomed the call from the new permanent secretary.

The director of Gombe schools, David Kyewalabye, challenged the Government to fast-track the use of modern technology in education. He noted that with the new focus on skills development, the country is headed for the middle income status.

Jessica Kwagala, a parent at the school, also asked the Government to start the skills training as early as primary school.

Sh426b
The money Uganda received from donors for health, technical and business institutions in the last financial year.

Donors shift attention to skills development

Meanwhile, partners and international financial institutions are gradually shifting attention to technical and vocational education. With additional boost in funding, the education sector in Uganda is now investing in infrastructural

development of technical and vocational education.

Uganda is one of the countries on the continent shifting attention to vocational education and linking it with economic development, according to the World Bank studies.

This partly explains why Kakooza and other educationists think this is the way to go.

In the last financial year, Uganda received about sh426b from donors for health, technical and business institutions.

At sh104b, the biggest chunk of funds was from the

Continental trend

The other African countries shifting attention to vocational education include Chad, Ethiopia, Guinea, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Zambia.

For example, Cameroon in its poverty reduction strategy document, is developing vocational and professional training to facilitate integration into the labour market and Ivory Coast talks about strengthening vocational training.

More so, Ghana links vocational education and training with education of the youth and the development of technical and entrepreneurial skills; Lesotho and Rwanda focus on linking TVET to businesses, while Malawi emphasises the need to promote self-employment through skills development.

World Bank, Belgium gave a sh44b grant and the Islamic Development Bank gave additional support of sh35b.

The state minister for higher education, Dr John Muyingo, says donors are focusing on skills development at higher institutions of learning.

Decades ago, attention of most donors was on primary and secondary education, especially with universal primary and secondary education.

With the economic recession and growing rate of unemployment in most developing countries, the education ministry notes that there is a gradual shift of attention by donors towards vocational education.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is back on the development agenda of many African countries, according to Dr George Afeti, the secretary general of the Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa and a TVET consultant to the African Union.

This follows a complex set of reasons that included budgetary constraints and criticisms of the World Bank in the early 1990s on its direction and focus.

The World Bank had argued at the time that the delivery of vocational education and training was not cost-effective.

However, since the beginning of the new millennium, a fresh awareness of the role that TVET can play in economic growth and national development has dawned among policy makers in many African countries.

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